THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS, SERVICE STATION (Building 30)
Corner of Alameda Avenue and Buena Vista Street
Burbank
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2639B

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS, SERVICE STATION

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Location: Building 30 on The Walt Disney Studios, at the corner of Buena Vista Street and Alameda Avenue, in Burbank, Los Angeles County, California. The building stands alone in the northern reaches of the Buena Vista parking lot of the studio, adjacent to the Buena Vista Street entrance.

USGS Burbank Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 11.377780.3780050

Present Owner: The Walt Disney Company

Present Occupant: Disney Studios Service Station. The gas for the station is apparently supplied by the Union 76 gasoline company, whose logo appears on several of the station's gas pumps.

Present Use: The Service Station provides gasoline for the executive employees of the studios. It is scheduled to be demolished as part of the creation of a new Buena Vista Gate entrance. The new entrance will be designed by the Hatch Design Group of Costa Mesa, California. A new gas station will be constructed in another location on the studio lot.

Significance: The Service Station is part of the Disney Studio complex, many buildings of which were constructed at the same time during the early 1940s. Although utilizing the same general stylistic scheme, the Service Station was constructed in different materials and using different building techniques from the other buildings of the original complex. The station remains an example of prefabricated gasoline station construction.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection:

1940. A photo of the studios' south parking lot taken in late 1940 is the first image found which shows the service station (supplemental photo L), and bookkeeping documentation from that same year outlines expenditures for the building's construction.

2. Architect: Not Known.

3. Original owner, occupant, uses:

As much as records can reveal, the service station has been owned and occupied by Disney since its creation; no evidence can be found that any gasoline company was the proprietor of the building.

4. Additions and alterations:

The 1940 photograph of the Service Station reveals that the columns which support the canopy-roof structure originally extended directly down to the service islands (supplemental photo L). At some point, possibly when the number of gasoline pumps on the pump islands was increased from two to three, the columns were cut and a beam was added which carried the load out to the ends of the islands (photo CA-2639-B-5). The footprint of the truncated columns still exist at the top of the islands.

Aside from this, the main components of the Service Station appear to be unaltered. Basic visual inspection cannot reveal any replacement of building materials, although the possibility cannot be ruled out. An air conditioning unit has been added to the exterior of the east side of the office (supplemental photo C). Upgraded mechanical equipment has been added to the office, and the alteration of some of the storage cabinets on the office's interior is also evident. Original suspended lighting fixtures have been replaced by fluorescent lamps.

Comparison of the 1940 image of the Service Station with current conditions reveals that the gasoline storage tanks are still placed in their original location, although the changing location of the tank openings may indicate the replacement of the original tanks.

B. Historical Context:

The studios at which Walt Disney created his animation were originally located in Silver Lake, California, near Los Angeles, and in Hyperion, some miles to the south-west of the city. In the late 1930s, due to the shortage of space at that facility as Disney's business expanded, plans for a new studio complex in Burbank were initiated; it was reported that despite Disney's successes in feature-length animation in the 1930s, the move severely taxed the resources of the company (interview with David Smith, Disney Archives). The plan for the complex allowed for a large amount of future development, and the construction of the site progressed slowly through the years of World War II; less than half the site was built in 1944.

At the new studio complex, a gasoline service station was constructed to handle the automotive needs of the Disney community. Bookkeeping records from that era show that Disney paid for the construction of the station, although research did not reveal the name of the company which provided the fuel and other service equipment. The finished building was apparently a product of the prefabricated gasoline station industry.

Prefabricated gasoline stations are a prominent part of the history of auto service in the United States. Oil companies, by ordering from companies which manufactured the stations, used the low cost and simple construction of prefab buildings to help them expand quickly into new market areas. In addition, companies could order and utilize large numbers of unusual or distinctive elements-- steeply pitched, tiled "oriental" roofs; porcelain enamel panels in a distinctive color scheme; Beaux-Arts pilasters; and so on-- to create a recognizable public image (Vieyra, Daniel I. *Fill 'er Up: An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations*). In the case of the Disney Studios Service Station, the company simply added a building which matched the stripped moderne styling of the other buildings of the complex. The station did not provide services that were available elsewhere on the studio grounds, such as food sales and rest roams, which allowed for a very small, utilitarian finished building. Although the construction of the Service Station apparently coincided with the construction of a service bay positioned along Buena Vista Street, and parking canopies within the south parking lot (supplemental photo L), there is no evidence that any single automotive supplier handled all three.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The Service Station is an utilitarian building of metal and glass, using a minimum of moderne styling and decoration to conceal its structure. A large metal truss, supported by four corner columns, forms the roof for the structure and the support from which the metal-and-glass walls of the office are hung.

2. Condition of fabric:

The Service Station is in good condition considering its age and use, although the possibility of the replacement of damaged or deteriorated elements cannot be ruled out. Visible evidence of material loss and deterioration is present, but minimal.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 41'-5" x 15'-11"

2. Foundations:

Plans show that the Service Station was constructed on a 20' - 0" x 58' - 0", 4" thick reinforced concrete slab, sloped slightly towards the south. The service islands and the office were raised 3-3/4" and 6-1/4", respectively, from the general slab.

3. Walls:

The walls of the office are composed of a system of painted sheet metal cladding and plate glass panes attached to a lattice of steel brackets. The brackets frame and delineate the panels at the building's base, the main windows, the transoms, and the door frames. Because the building was prefabricated, it is likely that the windows, metal panels, and angles were modular and partially preassembled.

4. Structural system, framing:

A large truss of bolted steel angles forms the structure of the roof and canopies of the Service Station (supplemental photo F, G, H, I, J). The angles which frame the walls are welded to steel angle plates hung from the roof truss, and the load of the truss is carried to the slab by a system of square steel beams and 4-1/2" diameter column supports.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

Two canopies extend east and west from the Service Station office, shading the pump islands and service areas. The truss system described above in II.B.4 forms the structure of the canopies, and these truss elements are hidden from view by painted metal panels. Metal columns support the canopies at their ends.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

Two doors exist in the Service Station, one each on the east and west wall of the office. Each door is painted wood, and has an inset full-length glass panel. The doors are framed by a system of steel brackets which are attached at the top and bottom to steel angle plates; the plate at the base is bolted to the slab, that at the top to the roof truss.

b. Windows and shutters:

Fixed glass panes fill the vast majority of the wall surface of the Service Station office. The individual lights vary in size from 1' 3-1/2" x 3' 6", in the transoms above the doors, to 5' 8" x 4' 8-7/8" in the paired lights along the north and south walls. The panes are held in place by the steel bracket system which is eventually attached to the roof truss system as described above. Tinted, reflective plastic sheets have been added to the interior of the window panes; these sheets do not appear in the 1940 photograph of the building.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

The two canopies, the roof of the office, and the parapet walls are a single structure, spanning the distance between the corner support columns. The design of this general roof structure incorporates an intricate structural truss hidden from the ground by metal panels. Vertical web elements run east-west along the

north and south edges of the roof, giving the structure rigidity. Two X-braces lying parallel to the roof plane act as lateral braces. (Supplemental photo H.)

The roofing material is composed of sheet metal panels laid flat in north-south runs, with large standing seams every 2'-0" on center. The roofing material is apparently the only weatherproofing for the building; the metal sheets are exposed as the "finished" ceiling material on the interior of the office and the underside of the canopies. The large standing seams appear to act as battens to support the panels, and are welded to the vertical web elements of the side trusses.

Gutters run east-west along the north and south edges of the roof, emptying into downspouts at the northwest and southwest corners of the office.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The cornice of the building is a functional design which is detailed to give a decorative effect. The trusses which form part of the central structural element of the building are covered with sheet metal, which protects the truss somewhat from the weather and at the same time presents itself to the exterior as a parapet wall. The sheet-metal box gutters surrounding this parapet are detailed to be structurally sound with a minimum of support, and the result appears as a streamlined frieze or eaves (photo CA-2639-B-10, supplemental photo K).

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

The plan of the Service Station is highly functional and straightforward. Pump islands at the east and west ends of the structure allow enough space for the passage of automobiles between themselves and the office. In plan, the office itself is a simple square, with storage space provided for the station's supplies.

2. Stairways: Not applicable.

3. Flooring:

In all areas, the floor of the Service Station is bare concrete.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

Walls and ceilings of the Service Station are finished in painted metal panels. The panels of the ceilings of the office and canopies are apparently the same panels which form the roof.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

The two doorways in the building are described in II.B.6.a.

b. Windows:

The windows of the building are described in II.B.6.b. There are no provisions made for decorative trim; window lights are glazed directly to the steel brackets and the resulting joint is left exposed.

The provision of windows in the office indicates that the office was designed as a moderately weather-proof but transparent area, within which the service station attendant could wait between customers.

6. Decorative features and trim:

The building can be characterized by its thorough lack of decorative features and trim. No effort beyond the enclosure of the roof trusses and the detailing of the box gutters was made to give decoration to the structure.

7. Hardware:

There is no notable or unusual hardware used on the windows or doors of the Service Station.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:

An electrical air conditioning unit has been added to the office. This unit takes the place of the transom window over the east door of the office (photo CA-2639-B-9, supplemental photo C).

b. Lighting:

There are six fluorescent light fixtures in the Service Station. Four are under the canopy, fitted flush to its underside. The remaining two are located in the office, hung from the ceiling.

On the exterior of the building, special switches can be found to control the exterior lighting of the structure. This type of switch can be found on a number of original buildings of the studio complex (supplemental photo A).

c. Plumbing: Not investigated.

d. Pump systems:

Three gasoline pumps are located on each pump island. A "Fuel Lock" computerized gasoline dispensing system has been installed in the building and the pumps, incorporating an emergency pump cutoff switch. The terminal for the system is located inside the office, and the fuel cutoff is located on the east exterior wall of the office (photo CA-2639-B-9, supplemental photo C).

The underground storage tanks for the station's gasoline are located to the south of the building. This location for the tanks was indicated in early plans, although it is unclear whether the current tanks are original.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design:

Photos and plans show that the south parking lot of the studio included, in addition to the Service Station and the service bays along Buena Vista Street, a number of parking canopies (supplemental photo L). Auto owners could provide moderate protection for their vehicles by parking under the canopies. These structures, which apparently still existed in 1987, have since been removed.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Provided by Robert Toor, Senior Facilities Engineer, Disney Studio Operations - Construction.

8. Early Photographic Views:

Provided by David Smith, Archivist, Disney Archives

C. Interviews:

Robert Toor, Senior Facilities Engineer, Disney Studio Operations - Construction

David Smith, Archivist, Disney Archives

D. 8ibliography:

"Disney Studios, Burbank, California," in *The Architectural Forum* 81 (September 1944): pp. 123-128.

Jakle, John A. and Keith A Sculle. *The Gas Station in America.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Liebs, Chester. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture.* New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.

National Petroleum News.

Vieyra, Daniel I. *Fill 'er Up: An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations.* London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1979.

"Walt Disney Studios," in *California Arts and Architecture* 58 (January 1941): PP. 26-27.

E. Supplemental Material:

Financial report on studio construction dated 5/18/40, provided by David Smith

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Directing Partner:	Ray Pepi, BCA
Project Manager:	Ricardo J. Viera, BCA
Project Assistants:	Richard Pounds, BCA Kevin Daly, BCA
Archival Assistance:	David Smith, Disney Archives
Drawings Assistance:	Robert Toor, Studio Operations - Construction
Sponsor:	The Disney Development Company Linn Beckmire, Project Manager

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~~APPENDIX~~
~~SUPPLEMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHS~~

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(p. 9)

SEE FIELD RECORDS
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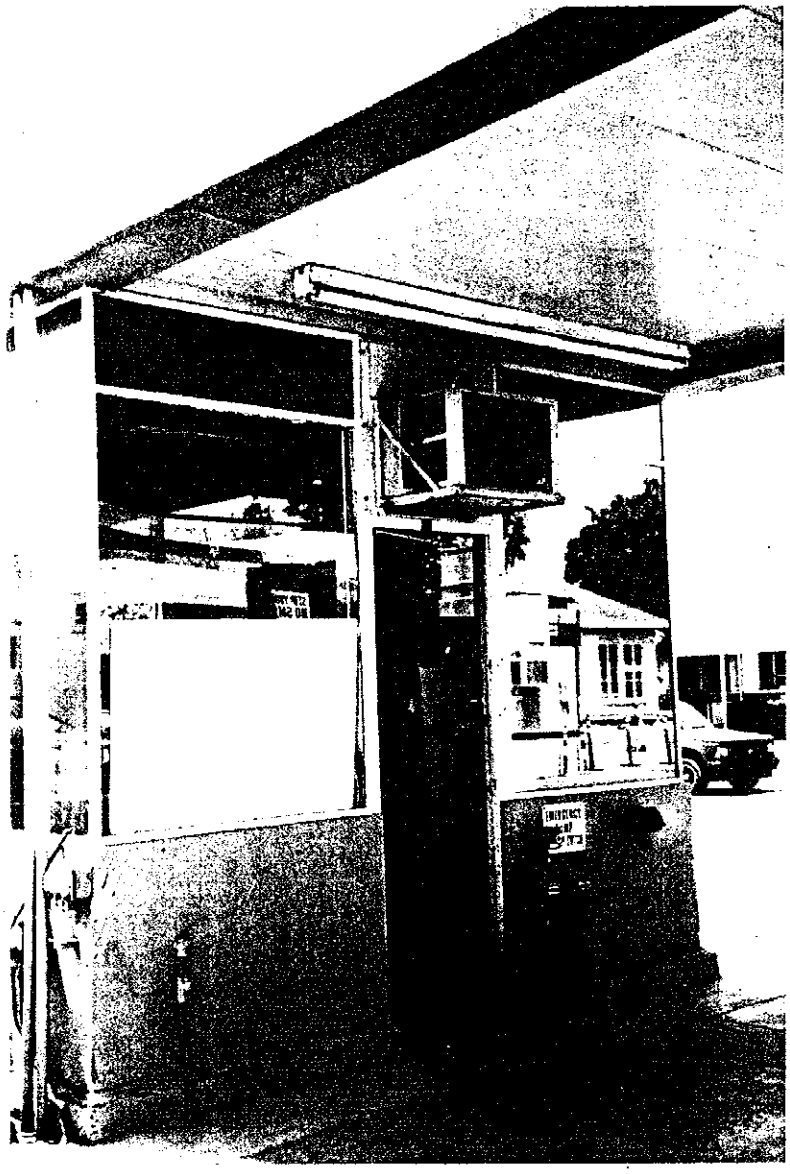
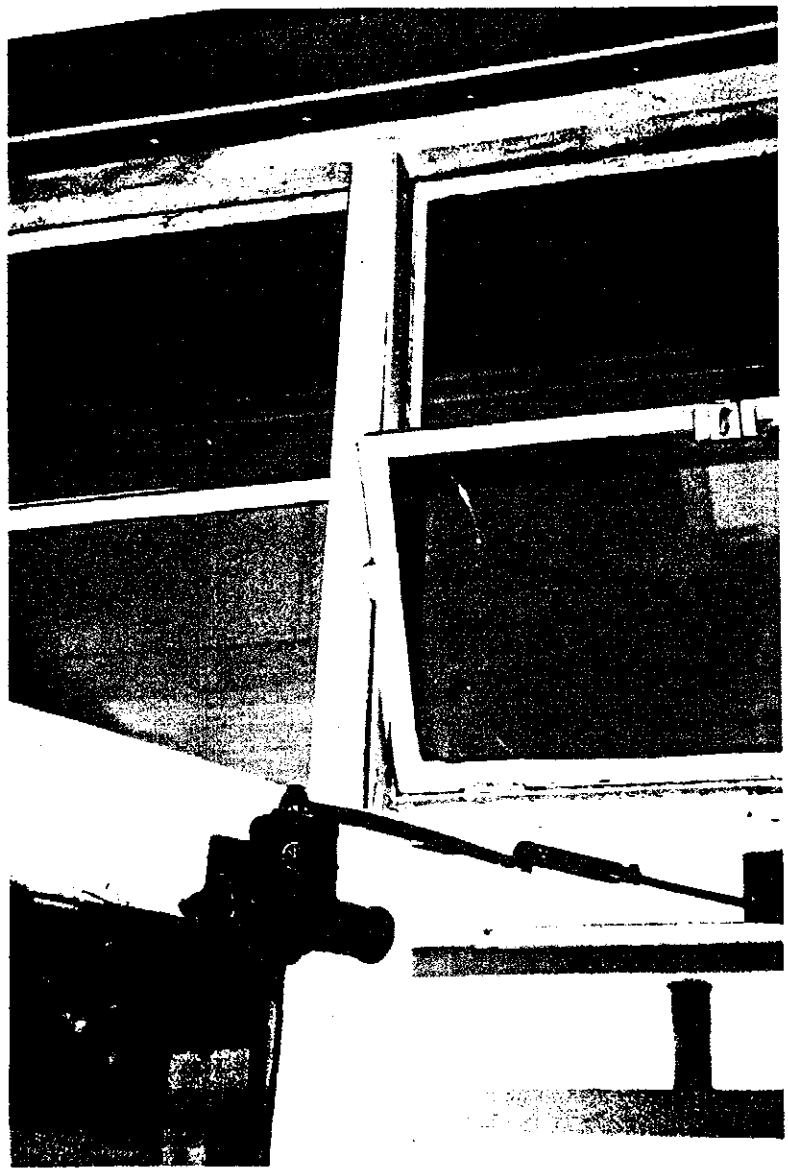
A-- Exterior south wall detail, showing light switch, facing northwest

B-- Exterior west side elevation, showing operable transom

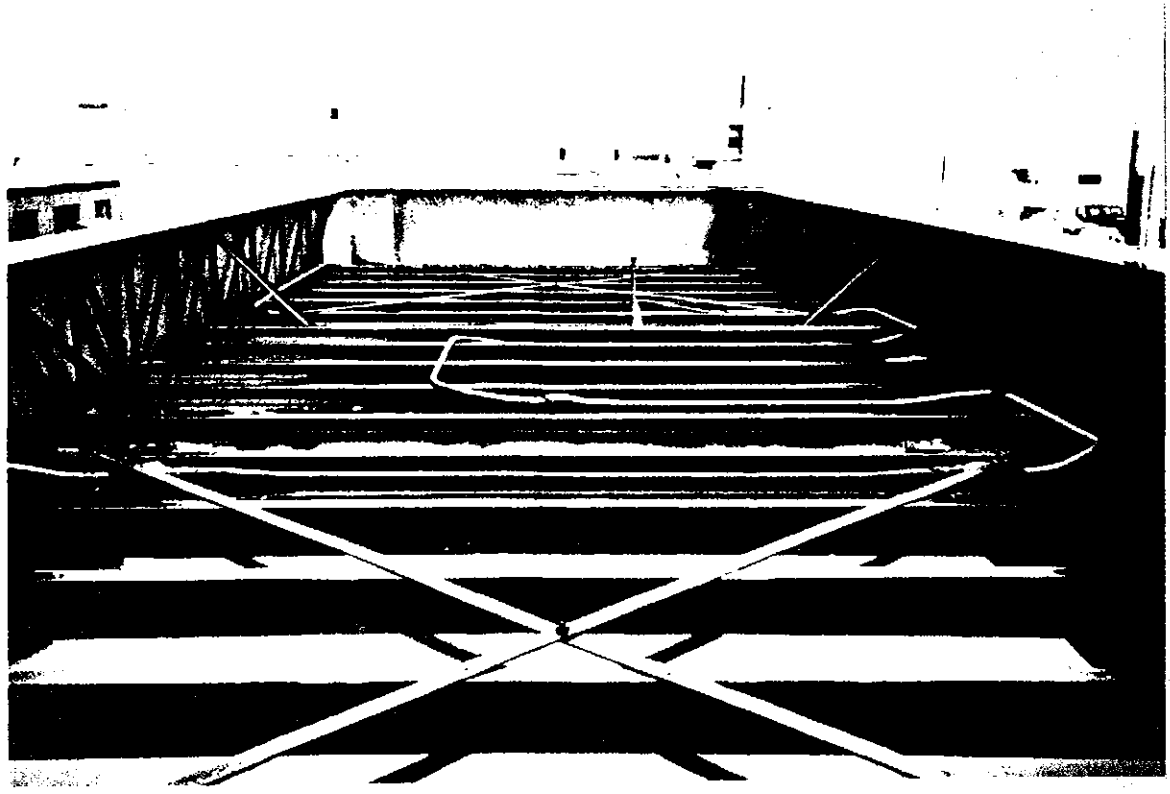


C-- Exterior east side elevation, facing northwest

D-- Interior detail, showing door jamb and ploor plate assembly, facing northwest

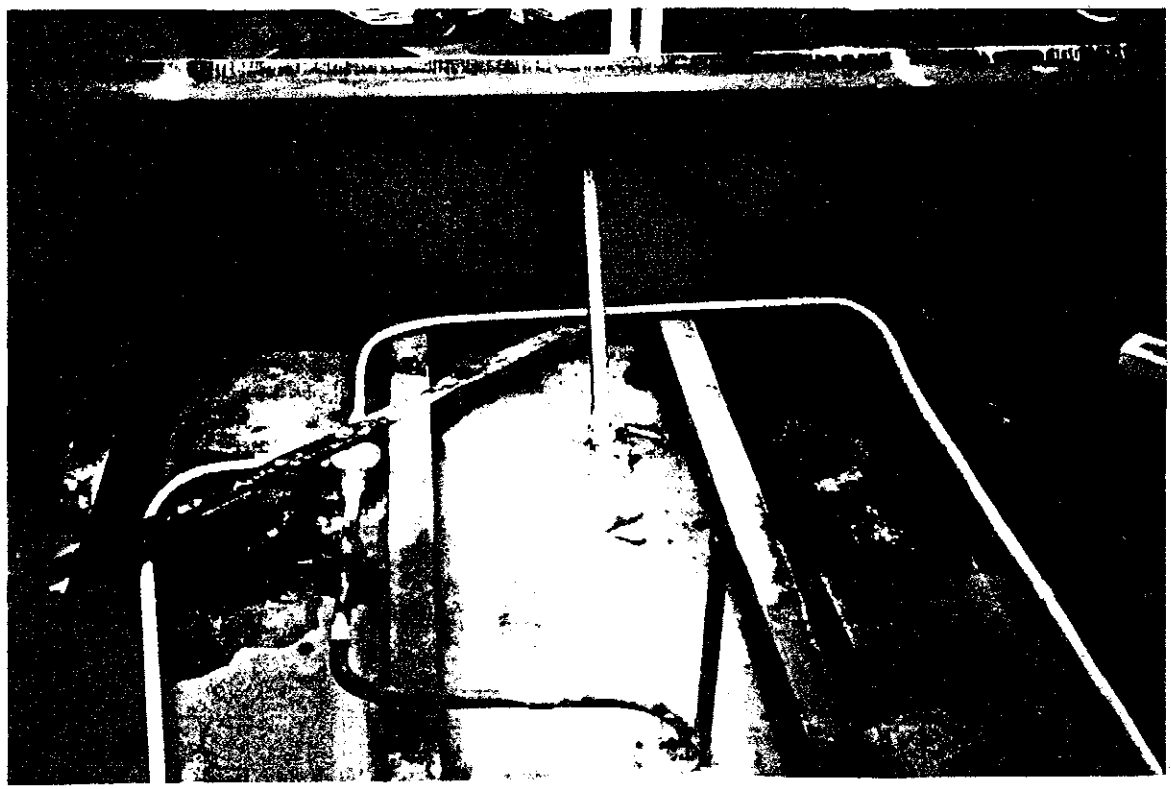


E-- Interior detail showing door and window detail, facing west



F-- Over-all exterior view of roof, facing east

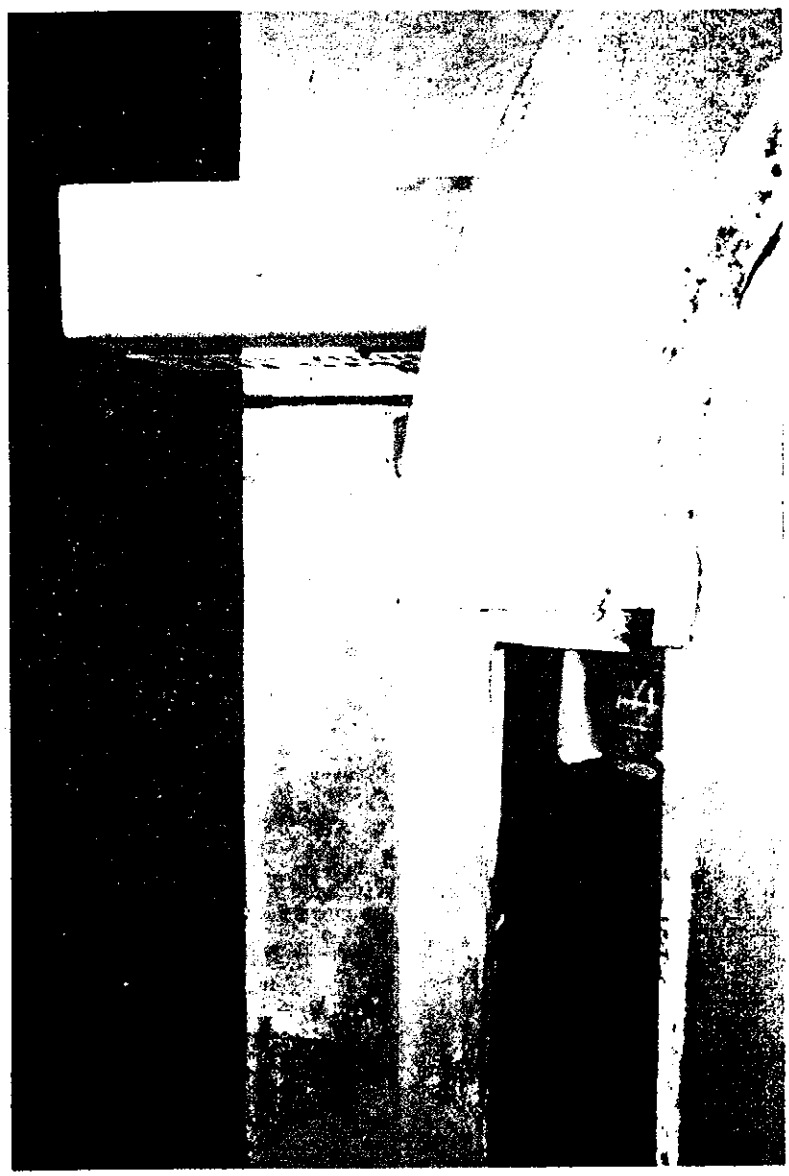
G-- Exterior roof detail at southwest corner



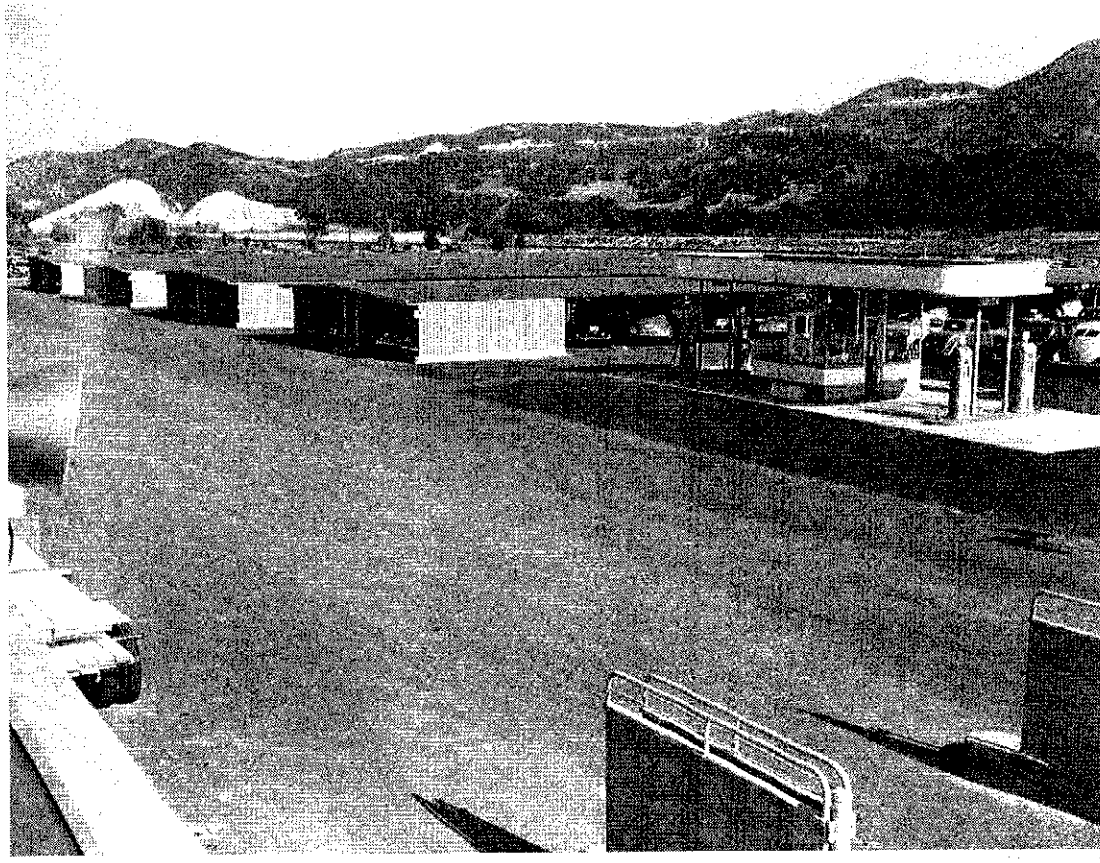
H-- Exterior roof detail, facing south

1-- Exterior truss detail, facing east

J-- Exterior truss detail, facing north



K-- Overhead view at box gutter, northeast corner



L-- Historic image: overall site view, facing southeast (1940)
Disney Archives negative #69-109-4